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NEGATIVE BURN

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IT WAS RAINING LIKE IT HAD BEEN RAINING FOREVER.

NOT THE PREGNANT, SILKY DROPS OF SUMMER RAIN, NOR THE ICY BULLETS OF WINTER STORM.

INCONSEQUENTIAL RAIN.

NOTHING RAIN.

IT WASN'T THE ***BEST TIME*** TO BE THERE, IN THAT TWILIGHT ZONE AFTER THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER WHEN THE WORLD TURNED AWAY FROM THE LIGHT...

...BUT WE'D AGREED TO DO IT FOR JOHN, AND ***ALTHOUGH THE THOUGHT*** WAS IN ALL OUR HEADS, HE MADE IT PLAIN THERE WAS ***NO TURNING BACK***.

COME ON, GORDON. WE'VE ONLY GOT ONE WEEKEND, ***FOR CHRIST'S SAKE***. I'D ***LIKE*** TO BE HOME BY CHRISTMAS.

THE ***FIRST*** RULE OF HILL WALKING IS TO GO AT THE SPEED OF THE ***SLOWEST*** MEMBER, PHIL.

WHAT DO ***YOU*** THINK, JOHN?

KEEP WALKING.

AND THERE WAS I, SAM JORDAN. ***WISHING*** I WAS ***HOME*** WITH MY GIRLFRIEND.

WISHING I WAS ***ANYWHERE***.

BUT THERE.

THE KING OF RAIN

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO THIS HOUSE AFTER...HOW LONG... *20 YEARS*?

EXACTLY 20 YEARS. TOMORROW.

I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT MORE AND MORE OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS.

BEFORE THAT, I HADN'T THOUGHT ABOUT IT SINCE THE SEVENTIES.

FUNNY HOW THINGS COME BACK TO YOU, OUT OF THE BLUE. I'VE NEVER SOLD IT. I *SUPPOSE* I SHOULD HAVE, REALLY. *GOD KNOWS* WHAT STATE IT'S IN.

THE ROOF'S *PROBABLY* FALLEN IN WITH THE WEATHER THEY GET UP HERE.

NOW HOW DID I DO THAT?

A BRUISE. A *HELL* OF A BRUISE.

I DON'T REMEMBER BANGING IT ON ANYTHING.

I WISH I HAD SEEN THE SIGNS BACK THEN, WHEN THERE WAS STILL A CHANCE TO GET AWAY.

I WISH...

THE RAIN FIZZED AND HISSED IN THE FIRE LIKE *LOST SOULS* AS WE MADE CAMP FOR THE NIGHT. THERE WAS NO SHELTER FOR THE TENTS. WE SAT TOGETHER, FOUR WORKMATES, WITH NOTHING IN COMMON, TRYING TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT *FOR JOHN'S SAKE*. HE *WAS* THE BOSS, AFTER ALL.

BLOODY *HORRIBLE* WEATHER.

STILL, WE'RE OUT OF THE HOUSE FOR THE WEEKEND.

A BREAK FROM THE WIFE AND KIDS.

SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO BE ON YOUR OWN WITH A FEW BLOKES TO GET BACK IN TOUCH WITH YOURSELF.

IT'S A REAL STRAIN *BURYING* ALL THE STUFF THAT MAKES US WHAT WE REALLY ARE, JUST SO WE'RE *ACCEPTABLE* TO THE WENCHES.

THEY WOULDN'T TOUCH US IF THEY *REALLY* KNEW.

HERE WE CAN BE OURSELVES.

LISTEN TO IRON JOHN!

I *NEVER* FELT LIKE THAT WITH BETH, BUT THERE WAS NO SENSE IN ARGUING.

BETH AND I WERE HAPPY... IN LOVE. THESE GUYS WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND THAT.

WHY WERE YOU SO *KEEN* TO COME BACK TO THE HOUSE, JOHN?

NOSTALGIA?

GOOD MEMORIES?

I BOUGHT IT IN THE 70S, TURNED IT FROM A RUIN TO A PALACE. IT WAS A LABOUR OF LOVE.

A GREAT LITTLE GETAWAY.

NICE PLACE TO BRING THE TOTTY TOO, I SHOULDN'T WONDER.

YES.

IT SAW ITS SHARE OF WOMEN.

SO WHY HAVEN'T YOU BEEN BACK FOR...

PHIL? YOUR NOSE IS BLEEDING?

I THOUGHT IT WAS THE RAIN LEAKING THROUGH THE SHELTER.

OH MY GOD!

BETTER GET A HANKIE ON IT, OLD BOY.

OH, GOD!

OH, GOD...

I HATE BLOOD!

HATE IT!

GOOD LORD!

THAT ISN'T *NATURAL!* HE MUST HAVE HEMORRHAGED!

SIT DOWN! YOU'RE ONLY MAKING IT *WORSE!*

STOP HIM. HOLD HIS HEAD BACK.

CHRIST! OH, CHRIST!

HERE... LET ME USE MY HANDKERCHIEF TO STAUNCH IT.

NOT NATURAL? THAT WAS AN UNDER-STATEMENT. I COULD FEEL THE BLOOD LITERALLY PUMPING OUT...

...OR BEING SUCKED OUT.

HANG ON, I THINK IT'S STOPPED.

YOU'RE *NOT* A HEMOPHILIAC, ARE YOU, PHIL?

NO.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED?

WHAT DO YOU THINK, JOHN?

JOHN?

I WAS WOKEN IN THE EARLY HOURS BY A DIFFUSE LIGHT IN THE TENT. IT WAS STILL RAINING.

AT FIRST I THOUGHT JOHN WAS READING.

THE PHOTO HAD THE FADED GLORY OF A 70'S SNAPSHOT. I'D KNOWN HIM FOR ALMOST *THREE YEARS* AND I'D *NEVER* SEEN IT BEFORE.

WHOEVER IT WAS, HE MUST HAVE LOVED HER *VERY* MUCH.

JOHN?

ARE YOU OKAY?

LATER, I THOUGHT I HEARD HIM CRY.

CLICK

JOHN SEEMED TO BE *OVER-REACTING*. THE PATH WAS PRECIPITOUS, BUT GORDON *DIDN'T SEEM* TO BE IN ANY DANGER.

HE SEEMED HARDER, *COLDER*.

DO YOU HAVE TO MARCH US SO *BLOODY HARD*, JOHN?

THIS IS A HOLIDAY, *NOT* THE DAMN MARINES.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

WOW, THAT'S *SOME* VIEW.

AND *SOME* DROP.

WHITE WATER FALLS. I USED TO COME HERE SOME NIGHTS WHEN I WAS STAYING AT THE HOUSE. WATCH THE SUN GO DOWN.

AND I BET YOU WEREN'T ALONE, EH, JOHN? A SIGHT LIKE *THIS* IS BETTER THAN FOREPLAY.

LOOK, IT'S *NOT* A *STRAIGHT* DROP. THERE'S A PATH DOWN THERE TO THE FALLS.

I'M GOING TO GET SOME OF THAT WATER FOR MY CANTEEN.

COME BACK!

LET HIM GO, JOHN. IT'S *HIS* STUPID NECK.

FOR GOD'S SAKE, GET HIM *AWAY* FROM THERE!

JOHN AVOIDED MY EYES OVER BREAKFAST AS IF HE *FEARED* I MIGHT ASK HIM ABOUT THE PHOTO.

THIS WATER TASTES *GREAT!*

SUDDENLY HE SLIPPED. HIS LEFT FOOT *PLUNGED* INTO THE WATERFALL.

WOA-HO! HAD YOU *GOING* THERE!

GOOD THING I'VE GOT THE *AGILITY* OF A GAZELLE.

THEN SOMETHING *STRANGE* HAPPENED. HIS FOOT, *SLIDING* TOWARDS THE WATER.

LIKE *SOMETHING* WAS PULLING HIM.

SOMETHING'S GOT HOLD OF MY ANKLE!

HANG ON, GORDON! I'M COMING!

AAAA

WE'VE *GOT* TO GET BACK. PHONE THE POLICE, AMBULANCE...*GOD*, WHO'S GOING TO TELL *HIS WIFE*? AND *HIS CHILDREN*?

WE'RE *NOT* GOING BACK.

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? *FOR GOD'S SAKE*, THE MAN'S *DEAD*. HE'S LYING THERE ON THE ROCKS.

WE'RE NOT GOING BACK.

YOU'RE MA --

CRACK!

IF I *HADN'T* REALIZED JOHN WAS CRAZY, I *KNEW* THEN. I DIDN'T *DARE* STAND UP TO HIM ON MY OWN.

FOR *TWO HOURS*, JOHN DROVE US ON AT A QUICKER PACE.

LOOK, I *CAN'T* GO ON ANY MORE. MY BACK'S IN *AGONY*. WILL YOU TAKE A LOOK AT IT? IT FEELS *RAW*.

COME ON, PHIL, I WANT TO GET THROUGH THIS AND BACK *AS MUCH* AS YOU DO. *NOTHING* COULD HAVE HURT YOUR BACK. IT'S PROBABLY JUST A SORE.

JUST HAVE A *LOOK*, WILL YOU?

JESUS...

WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO WALK FROM EDALE IN *THIS* CONDITION?

IN *WHAT* CONDITION? JUST *TELL ME* WHAT'S WRONG!

SHE'S MARKED HIM.

WHO HAS? JOHN, YOU'VE *GOT TO TELL US* WHAT'S GOING ON.

CRACK!

AAAARGH!

PHIL BLACKED OUT. I ROLLED UP HIS TROUSER LEG WHERE HE HAD CLUTCHED AT IT...

WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON?

PUT UP THE TENT. WE'LL LEAVE HIM HERE.

YOU CAN'T *LEAVE HIM* IN THIS CONDITION. HE MIGHT *DIE!*

HE'S ALREADY DEAD. HE JUST DOESN'T KNOW IT YET.

SHE'S MARKED HIM.

I FELT SICK, TIRED, AND *SUDDENLY* I WAS SEEING THINGS--OUT OVER THE *MISERABLE* UPLANDS, *A FIGURE*, SHADOWING OUR PROGRESS.

THE HOUSE WAS IN *WORSE* CONDITION THAN WE ANTICIPATED, JUST *A PILE OF ROCKS*, LIKE IT HAD BEEN BLASTED APART FROM *WITHIN*. JOHN DIDN'T SEEM TO CARE.

I'M REALLY NOT A BAD GUY, SAM.

SOMETIMES YOU CAN HURT PEOPLE WITHOUT REALIZING. THAT'S NOT BAD, SURELY, IF IT'S *NOT CONSCIOUS*. CAN YOU BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR *OWN* BLINDNESS?

TELL ME, SAM... DO YOU HAVE TO COMMIT A *REAL* MURDER TO BE HAUNTED? OR IS *PSYCHOLOGICAL* MURDER ENOUGH?

I WOULDN'T KNOW, JOHN.

DARKNESS FELL. JOHN DRANK WHISKY AND GREW MAUDLIN.

I USED TO BE A *REAL WOMANIZER* WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. I LIKE WOMEN. I *LOVED* WOMEN.

CHATTING THEM UP, GETTING OFF WITH THEM. IT GAVE ME A *THRILL* WHEN THEY FELL FOR ME.

I LOST INTEREST AS SOON AS I KNEW THAT. *STILL* DON'T KNOW WHY.

"THERE WAS ONE GIRL, ANGELA CALLIS. SHE CAME TO WORK FOR ME. I ASKED HER OUT. SHE REFUSED."

"NO ONE HAD EVER DONE THAT BEFORE. I BECAME OBSESSED."

"FINALLY SHE GAVE IN. I BROUGHT HER HERE TO THE HOUSE AND AFTER SEX SHE TOLD ME WHY SHE HAD KEPT HERSELF CLOSED OFF FROM ME, FROM THE WORLD."

"SHE'D BEEN PHYSICALLY ABUSED BY HER MOTHER AS A CHILD. *TERRIBLE* INJURIES WERE INFLICTED. SHE HADN'T TRUSTED *ANYONE* TO GIVE HER LOVE."

"UNTIL ME."

"I LISTENED CAREFULLY AND THEN LATER I THANKED HER FOR THE ONE-NIGHT STAND. SHE LOOKED AT ME, PAINFULLY, ONCE BEFORE SLEEP."

"AND IN THE MORNING I FOUND HER."

"SHE LEFT ME A NOTE. *'I WANTED TO LIVE WITH YOU AND SLEEP WITH YOU AND DIE WITH YOU. YOU GAVE ME A KINGDOM OF SUNSHINE AND HOPE...'*"

"...AND *NOW* ALL THERE IS, IS *RAIN*."

TWO MONTHS AGO, SHE CAME TO ME. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. HER FACE, *SO WHITE*. I KNEW *THEN* I HAD TO COME BACK TO MAKE PEACE WITH HER. *BEFORE...*

A STORM BLEW UP FROM NOWHERE. IN A *SUDDEN* CRASH OF LIGHTNING, I *THOUGHT* I SAW...

THE WIND CAME OUT OF THE NIGHT LIKE A *BANSHEE*, EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE IN AN INSTANT.

JOHN YELLED SOMETHING I COULDN'T HEAR.

AND THEN THERE WAS ONLY *THE DARK*...AND THE *RAIN*. I SCRAMBLED AROUND UNTIL MY FINGERS CLOSED ON MY TORCH.

AND IN ITS LIGHT I SAW...

I SAW...

...RUNNING...

...BEHIND ME...

HER *FACE*, BONE-WHITE...

...LIKE *DEATH*...,

...AND I WAS RUNNING FOR THE *SAKE OF MY SOUL*...

AND THEN THE GROUND FELL AWAY FROM ME, AND I THOUGHT, *'THIS IS IT.'*

'I'M GOING TO...'

I SURVIVED THROUGH ***BLIND LUCK***. A GORSE BUSH HALFWAY DOWN THE ***SHARP*** INCLINE. BENEATH ME, A ***NASTY*** MESS OF GRANITE BOULDERS.

BUT I WILL NEVER, ***EVER*** ESCAPE WHAT I SAW.

LAST NIGHT I HAD AN ARGUMENT WITH BETH, A ***STUPID*** ONE BROUGHT ON BY THE STRESS OF WHAT I'D BEEN THROUGH.

SOME ***HARSH*** WORDS WERE SAID.

AND THIS MORNING I HAD THE BRUISE.

I DIDN'T ***MEAN*** ANYTHING, BUT THAT'S ***NOT*** THE POINT, IS IT? WE'RE ALL AGGRESSORS. AND I'LL ***NEVER KNOW*** IF SHE'S HERE, ***WAITING*** TO METE OUT HER TERRIBLE VENGEANCE.

UNTIL I SUDDENLY GLIMPSE THAT WHITE FACE AGAIN.

END

MR. MAMOULIAN

THE WELL-SPRING OF LIFE

1.7.97 BOLLAND

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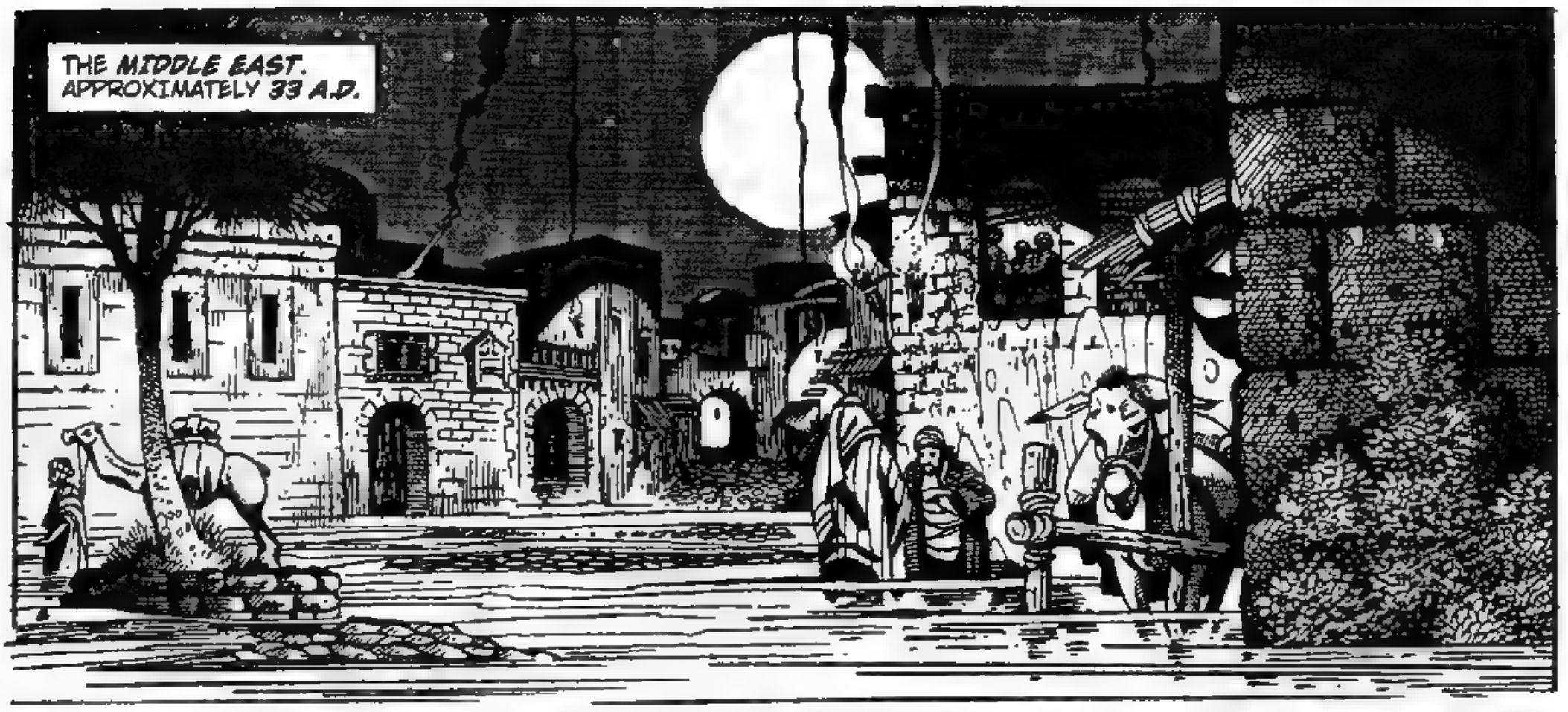
HOWDY, PARDNER
OH, IT'S YOU
WELL THAT WAS A COOL RECEPTION IF EVER THERE WAS ONE.
I KNOW, YOU'VE JUST COME TO TORTURE ME AGAIN.
TORTURE YOU ?! WHAT DO YOU MEAN... TORTURE YOU !?
YOU'RE HERE TO TEMPT ME AND ENTICE ME WITH SOME PROMISE OR OTHER AND THEN DISAPPEAR ON ME, AREN'T YOU!
I DON'T DISAPPEAR ON YOU! YOU SEND ME AWAY! IT'S TRUE. YOU DO! I HAVE NO SAY IN THE MATTER.
I MEAN LOOK AT ME! I DON'T HAVE A STITCH ON! I'M TOTALLY AT YOUR DISPOSAL. I COME CRAWLING TO YOU AND WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT I OFFER YOU EVERYTHING! I'M EXACTLY THE WAY YOU IMAGINED ME.
THAT'S RIGHT. I'M A FIGMENT OF YOUR IMAGINATION. YOU MADE ME. I'M YOUR IMAGINARY FRIEND. DO I HAVE TO SPELL IT OUT? YOU'RE PULLING THE STRINGS. YOU MAKE ME COME AND YOU MAKE ME LEAVE.
SEEMS LIKE A ROTTEN DEAL DON'T YOU THINK? HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE IN MY POSITION? IF THERE WERE A FEMINIST OBSERVING THIS SCENARIO SHE'D BE PRETTY PISSED OFF ABOUT IT WOULDN'T SHE?
FEMINIST? WHERE!?
BUT IN A CERTAIN WAY I HOLD THE BALANCE OF POWER HERE, DON'T I? BECAUSE I KNOW HOW YOUR MIND WORKS. I KNOW THAT HAVING MADE ME YOU ARE IN MY SPELL.
YOU SEE THIS LEG? TAKE A LOOK. IT'S PULSING WITH LIFE ISN'T IT.
GO ON! TAKE HOLD OF IT!
THAT'S IT. IT'S ALL RIGHT, I UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU. YOU'RE A REASONABLE MAN. YOU HAVE NO WISH TO EXPLOIT AND DEGRADE HALF THE HUMAN POPULATION...
YOU JUST WANT THE OCCASIONAL SIP FROM THE WELL-SPRING OF LIFE DON'T YOU? A PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE REQUIREMENT IT SEEMS TO ME.
OF COURSE A FEMINIST MIGHT SEE IT DIFFERENTLY.


THE MIDDLE EAST.
APPROXIMATELY 33 A.D.

"AND EVENING FELL, THEY WENT TO THE PLACE OF A GOOD MAN IN THE CITY FOR THE FEAST OF THE UNLEAVENED BREAD--"

PROPHET'S BEARD! WHAT MAGIC IS THIS--?

YO DUDES!

WHY ALL THE *DOOM* AND *GLOOM?* I? THOUGHT THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A FARKIN *PARTY?*

FUNGUYS IN "THE VERY LAST SUPPER"

YEAH! LIKE. WHERE'S THE *BABES?*

CHEER UP, MAN! IT MIGHT NEVER HAPPEN!

WHAT DOST THOU HERE?

WE'RE THE *FUNGUYS*. DUDE! WE *CRASH PARTIES!*

I'M *TOWNHALL* AND THAT'S MR. *BLEWETT.*

DON'T BOGART THE BOOZE, MAN!

I WILL NOT DRINK THIS FRUIT OF THE WINE UNTIL I DRINK IT IN MY FATHER'S KINGDOM.

SUIT YOURSELF--

PERSONALLY I HAVE A *NO-WAIT POLICY!*

DRY BREAD AN' RED BIDDY? WHAT KINDA CHEEZY PARTY IS THIS?

SOME BIG DEAL FEAST OF THE PASSOVER WAS WHAT I HEARD. MAYBE THEY JUST NEED A LITTLE WARMIN' UP...!

HEY. YOU GUYS INTO GAMES?

TWISTER? STRIP POKER?

VERILY I SAY TO YOU, THIS NIGHT ONE AMONG YOU WILL BETRAY ME.

GUESSING GAME, HUH? LIKE "PIN THE TAIL ON THE TRAITOR"?

IS IT I?

IS IT I?

IS IT I?

I BET TWENTY BUCKS IT'S HIM!

HE THAT DIPPETH HIS SOP IN THE DISH. THE SAME SHALL BETRAY ME.

OKAY- WHO DIPPED HIS SOP?

C'MON GUYS THERE'S MONEY RIDING ON THIS!

JUDAS DIPPED HIS SOP!

I KNEW IT! THAT'S TWENTY YOU OWE ME, JUDE!

I HAVE BUT THIRTY SILVER PIECES. CAN YOU MAKE CHANGE?

LET US SING A HYMN.

THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK, MAN--

WE *NEVER* TRAVEL WITHOUT THE OLE *KARAOKE!*

GOOD EVENING, ONE AND ALL. LET'S GET THIS PARTY SWINGIN' WITH A SONG I'M SURE YOU ALL KNOW AND LOVE--

DO THE MACARENA... DO THE MACARENA!

C'MON EVERYBODY ON THE FLOOR NOW!

"AFTER, THEY WENT OUT ONTO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES--"

I WILL SMITE THE SHEPARD, AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SLAUGHTERED.

RIGHT! I DIG *KEBABS* MYSELF, MAN!

BEFORE THE COCK CROWS, YOU WILL DENY ME.

SHEESH! ONE-TRACK KINDA GUY, AIN'T HE?

PETE'S OKAY. HE AIN'T GONNA DENY *NOBODY*. RIGHT, *PETEY?*

CHILL OUT, MAN. YER BRINGIN' *EVERYBODY* DOWN!

A *MULTITUDE* ARMED WITH STICKS AND STAVES!

PROPHECY MUST BE FULFILLED.

"AND JUDAS MADE TO KISS HIM. TO IDENTIFY HIM TO THE MOB--"

HEY, JUDE!

FRIENDLY TYKE, AIN'T YA?

HE IS THE ONE! SEIZE HIM

B-B-BUT--!

"AND THE DISCIPLES FORSOOK HIM. AND FLED--"

YEE-HAAA!

PARTY AIN'T A PARTY WITHOUT A GOOD FIGHT!

AMEN TO THAT, BRO!

KLONK!

PONK!

TAKE THEM TO PILATE FOR SENTENCE!

B-B-BUT--!

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG

OH, MAN! THAT WINE PACKS MORE OF A *WALLOP* THAN YOU'D THINK!

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG

WILL YOU *SHUT UP!* I GOT A *HEADACHE* HERE FIT TO *KILL* ME!

ERK!

WHAT A NIGHT! FIRST JUDAS *HANGS* HIMSELF-THEN WE'RE *TRIED* AN' *CONVICTED!*

HIT THAT *TIME-BELT*, BLEWETT, AND GET US OUT OF HERE!

MAN, IS *HE* GONNA HAVE SOME HANG-OVER!

A great day to start again

by MICHEL LACOMBE

LOVE IS THE WHOLE HISTORY OF A WOMAN'S LIFE; IT IS ONLY AN EPISODE IN MAN'S.

-Germaine de STAËL-

'SCUSE ME, MISS...

COULD I HAVE ONE O' THOSE CIGARETTES?

UH...

OR MAYBE SOME CHANGE?

7h à 22h MAR au DIM

...I DON'T...

JUST A QUARTER, MISS...

HA HA HAAA

LET GO OF ME!

LEAVE ME ALONE, ALL OF YOU!

J'VOUS D'MANDE PARDON?

WHACK

SPUNK

OWWW!

MISS?

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MISS? THAT SOUNDED LIKE A PRETTY NASTY FALL.

HMM... THIS LOOKS WORSE THAN IT ACTUALLY IS. I'D BETTER CLEAN IT UP, THOUGH. COME ON INSIDE, AND...

NO! I MEAN THAT ISN'T...

WHAT'S GOING ON, MOMMY?

A LADY FELL IN THE ALLEY, SWEETIE. DADDY'S TAKING CARE OF HER.

CAN YOU GET UP? ARE YOUR LEGS HURT?

Uh, NO. LOOK, YOU SHOULN'T BOTHER...

OH? AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO? LEAVE YOU OUT HERE TO BLEED?

I'M MARTIN BOLLAND. MY WIFE JUDITH, MY DAUGHTER TRACY. THE BEAR'S NAME CHANGES DAILY...

HIS NAME'S AL!

AND HE DOESN'T BITE, SO COME ON IN, MISS...

ANN. MY NAME'S ANN BROWN.

PLEASED TO MEET YOU, ANN.

MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK WITH SOME BANDAGES FOR THAT HAND

SAY GOOD NIGHT TO OUR GUEST, TRACY, AND IT'S OFF TO BED YOU GO!

GOOD NIGHT, ANN!

GOOD NIGHT, TRACY.

MOMMY, CAN I HAVE A GLASS OF WATER?

NO I HAVEN'T!

YOU'VE ALREADY HAD ONE.

YES YOU HAVE!

HERE WE GO!

WHA...? OH, SORRY, I THINK I'M A BIT STUNNED...

NO PROBLEM. DO YOU LIVE AROUND HERE?

NO. I CAME UP FROM THE SOUTH SHORE TO SURPRISE MY BOYFRIEND AT THIS PARTY. I JUST DIDN'T EXPECT TO SURPRISE HIM WITH SOMEONE ELSE...

Oh. I'M SORRY.

IT'S ALL RIGHT. I ONLY WISH I HADN'T THROWN THE CAR KEYS TO HIS FACE BEFORE RUNNING OUT...

WELL, THAT'S A PRETTY LONG WAY TO WALK BACK...

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT: YOU CAN SLEEP IN MY BED TONIGHT...

...WHILE I SLEEP IN MY WIFE'S, OF COURSE.

SEPARATE BEDROOMS, HON. THE SECRET OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE. COME ON...

...I THINK YOU'LL FIT INTO ONE OF MY NIGHT-GOWNS WITH ROOM TO SPARE...

...YOU CAN START FRESH AFTER A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MISS?

...HEADING OUT FIRST THING TOMORROW MORNING.

I'LL MISS YOU.

IT'S TIME, HON. THAT'S HOW IT WORKS.

I KNOW. IT'S JUST THAT IT SEEMS SHORTER EVERY TIME...

ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL BE OKAY OUT THERE?

POSITIVE. NOW COME HERE...

ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

MOMMY?

WHA...? OH, NO, SWEETHEART, I'M ANN, THE LADY FROM THE ALLEY, REMEMBER?

MOMMY, THERE'S AN ELEPHANT IN MY ROOM!

I...

YOU JUST HAD A NIGHTMARE, SWEETHEART, THAT'S ALL!

NO I DIDN'T! IT'S BIG AND GRAY AND IT WANTS TO EAT ME!

COME ON, I'LL SHOW YOU...

...SEE? THERE'S NO ELEPHANT HERE, IS THERE?

IT'LL COME BACK WHEN YOU'RE GONE!

STAY WITH ME, MOMMY, PLEASE?

OH, ALL RIGHT...

...BUT JUST FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

HMM?

MRS BOLLAND! I... I'M SORRY. I JUST...

JUDITH. AND DON'T BE SORRY. YOU TWO ARE A SWEET SIGHT.

BESIDES, I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU'RE GETTING COMFORTABLE ALREADY...

COMFORTABLE? WHAT DO YOU...

...WAIT A MINUTE...

WHAT IS THIS? WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?

WILL YOU JUST

STOP

WHERE'S THE ALLEY? WHERE ARE WE?

THIS IS WHERE I GET OFF.

ONCE I'M GONE, THIS DOOR WILL OPEN ON ANY STREET YOU CHOOSE.

WHA...

HOW...

YOU...

YOU'RE GIVING ME YOUR PLACE? IS THAT WHAT THIS IS?

IT'S NOT MY PLACE, HON. I JUST NEEDED TO BE HERE FOR A WHILE.

AND NOW I GUESS YOU DO.

DON'T WORRY. THINGS WILL WORK OUT FINE. THEY ALWAYS DO HERE.

AND WHEN YOU'VE HAD YOUR FILL OF THAT, THE REAL WORLD WILL STILL BE OUT THERE.

TAKE CARE!

GOODBYE.

ALONE. YES, THAT'S THE KEY WORD, THE MOST AWFUL WORD IN THE ENGLISH TONGUE. MURDER DOESN'T HOLD A CANDLE TO IT AND HELL IS ONLY A POOR SYNONYM.

Stephen KING, Salem's Lot.

MICHEL LACOMBE 1996

WHO DARES TO FACE WHOOT!!

THE GIANT FISH WHO WALKS LIKE A MAN? AND SINGS LOUSY SONGS!

THY-Y-YME! ♫ ♪ IT'S A SPICE! IT'S A PLANT! WHOA-O-O! ♫

WHAT IS THIS MONSTROUS MENACE AND WHAT DOES IT WANT (besides your ear-drums)? READ ON, DEAR READER, AND FIND OUT ... IF YOU DARE!

The Adventures of **Simone & Ajax**™

by ANDREW PEPOY

OUR STORY BEGINS ON THE GROUNDS SURROUNDING THE RUINS OF RENE de CHARTRES CATHEDRAL, NOW THE HOME OF OUR HEROINE AND HERO, SIMONE AND AJAX.

HEY, AJAX! LOOK WHAT JUST CAME!

IT'S OUR LATEST ORDER OF COMIC BOOKS!

OH, BOY! LET'S GO DOWN BY THE LAKE AND READ 'EM!

© 1997 by Andrew Pepoy

DID WE GET ANYTHING GOOD?

OF COURSE! WE GOT THE LATEST "KANE," "BONE," AND "RAGMOP" AND "FEMFORCE," "SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATRE," "BETTY & VERONICA," "CAVEWOMAN," "UNCLE SLAM," "STRANGE ATTRACTORS," AND EVEN SOME OLD STUFF LIKE "CAVE GIRL" AND "THE HANGMAN."*

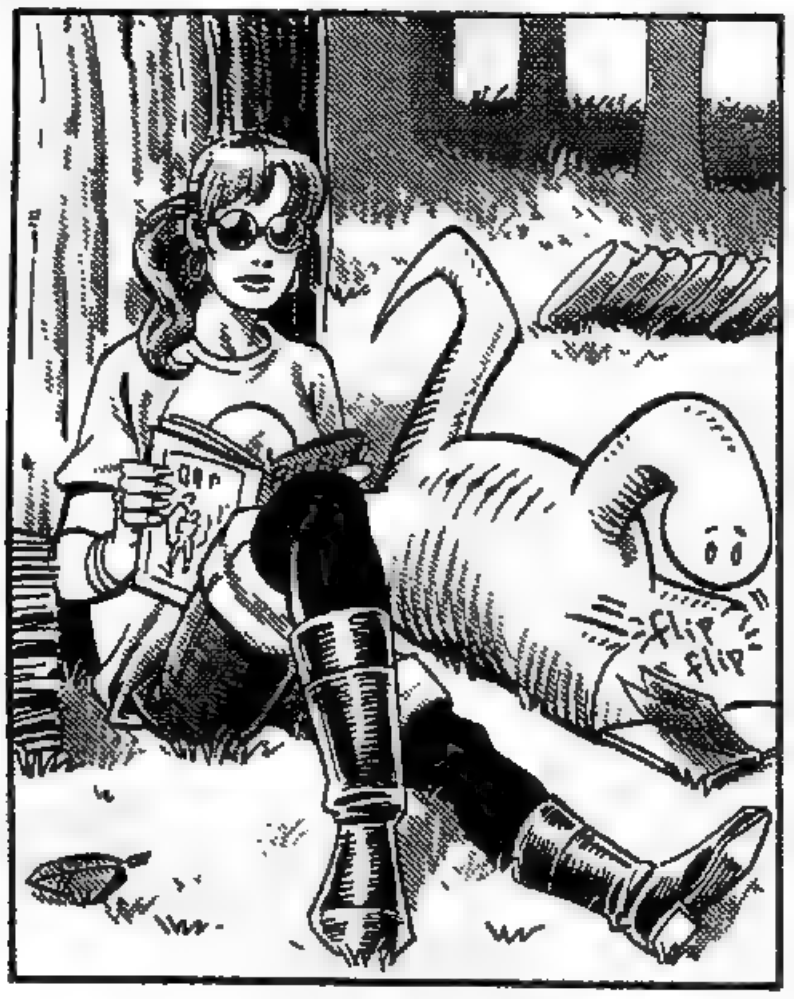
ANY STRIP REPRINTS?

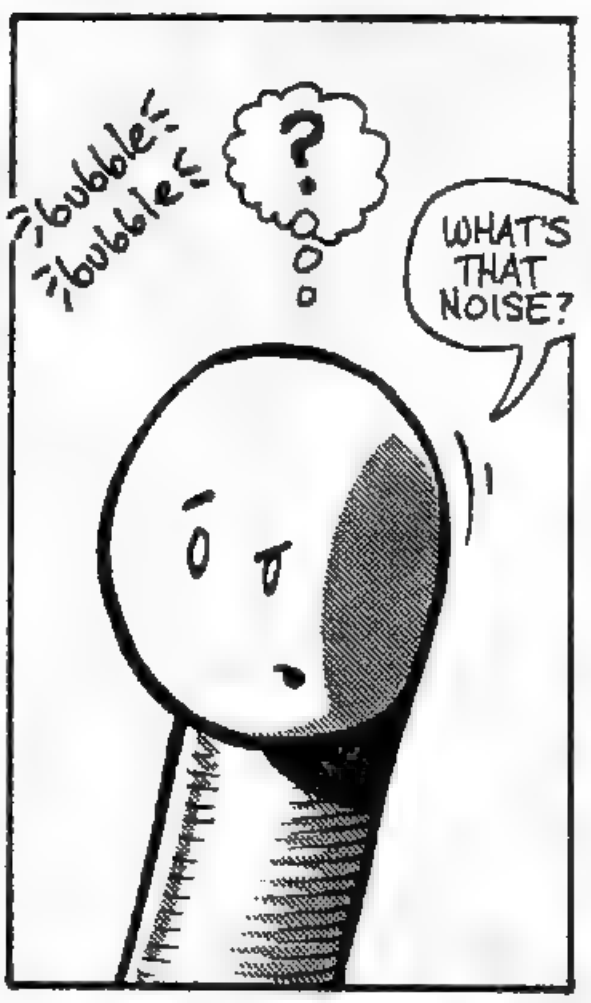
YEP, THOSE, TOO! HERE "WASH TUBBS AND CAPTAIN EASY," "SCORCHY SMITH," AND "COMICS REVUE" WITH "BUZ SAWYER," KIRBY'S "SKYMASTERS," "FLASH GORDON," AND "KRAZY KAT." AND EVEN THAT RUSSELL KEATON BOOK WITH LOTS OF HIS "FLYIN' JENNY" STRIPS. AND SOME PULPS, TOO!*

WOW!

BIG FUN COMICS

IRON MAN





*TRY SOME OF THESE GREAT COMICS: Sample FEMFORCE or CAVE GIRL (reprint) plus other goodies, $5 to AC Comics, P.O. Box 1216, Longwood, FL 32752 • Sample STRANGE ATTRACTORS, $3 to Retrografix, 67 Emerald St, Suite 623, Keene, NH 03431 • Sample COMICS REVUE, $6 to Manuscript Press, P.O. Box 336, Mountain Home, TN 37684.

IT'S WHOOT!.

THE GIANT FISH WHO WALKS ♪ LIKE A MAN! Woa-ho-o! ♪

AND SINGS LOUSY SONGS!

EEP! WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

ONCE UPON A TI-I-I-IME ♫ I WAS JUST A LITTLE, INEBRI-ATED FISH ♪ LIVING IN MY SOL-I-TUDE ♫ IN MY BEER-FILLED BOWL IN A FRAT HOUSE. EVERY-THING WAS JUST FINE (WHAT I CAN REMEMBER OF IT) ♪ UNT-I-I-IL ♫....

"...SOMEONE BROUGHT IN SOMETHING CALLED A RECORD. FROM IT CAME THE SAME, BLAND ♪ GUITAR-ROCK THE BOYS USUALLY PLAYED. BUT THEN THEY PLAYED IT ♫ BACKWARDS!

"I HEARD STRANGE ♪ WORDS AND SOUNDS. IT DID SOME-THING TO MY BEER-SOAKED ♫ BRA-A-AIN ♪.

APPEARING DEAD, I WAS FLUSHED DOWN THE TOILET. IN THE SEWER, THE CHEAP ♫ BEER IN MY BODY MIXED WITH SOME RADIOACTIVE GOOP. I CHA-A-ANGED AND GREW ♪. I KNEW THAT I'D BECOME...

...WHOO-OOT!♫

AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR A SNACK!

Uh, AJAX?

Yeah,... I KNOW.

RUN!

DO YOU THINK THIS HAPPENED 'CAUSE WE HAD FISH 'N' CHIPS LAST NIGHT?

I DUNNO. BUT I WOULDN'T TELL HIM ABOUT IT.

HE'S "FRIED" UP ENOUGH ALREADY.

WHERE ARE THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS AND A 700-GALLON DEEP-FRYER WHEN YOU NEED 'EM?

I HEARD THAT!

WHAM!

OOF!

I CAN SEE THE HEADLINES NOW: "FLIPPER FLATTENS FRIENDS LIKE FLAPJACKS!"

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GOING TO BE FISH FOOD.

huh?

I'VE GOT AN IDEA!

HURRY! INTO THE HOUSE! I KNOW HOW TO STOP HIM!

YOU DO?

IT'S GOT TO BE HERE IN THE CUPBOARD.

A-HA! GOT IT!

WHAT IS IT?

NO TIME TO EXPLAIN! QUICK! UPSTAIRS!

I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

That's CYNICALMAN on Simone's T-shirt! For a CYNICALMAN mini-comic and NAC catalog send 50¢ to Matt Feazell at Not Available Comics, 3867 Bristow, Detroit, MI 48212.

AND IN A MOMENT...

IS THIS =huff= REALLY NECESSARY?

JUST HOLD ME LIKE THIS FOR A COUPLE MINUTES, YOU'LL SEE!

JUST THEN, WHOOT! ENTERS-

♫ WHERE ARE YOU-U? YOU'RE OUT OF ♫ TI-I-I-ME!

Oh, Yeah? WELL GET A TASTE OF THIS!

=GULP!=

URP!

NOT FEELING TOO GOOD, hmmm?

FLOP!

SIMONE! HE'S OUT! WHAT WAS IN THAT CAN HE ATE? POISON?

WELL, HE WAS HUNGRY, SO I THOUGHT I'D GIVE HIM SOME FISH FOOD.

FISH FOOD?

Yeah. YOU KNOW WHAT THEY AL-WAYS SAY ABOUT IT,...

...IF YOU FEED THEM MORE THAN A FEW FLAKES YOU'LL KILL 'EM.

!

NOW LET'S GO FINISH THOSE COMICS.

GOOD IDEA! BUT SOMETIMES I GOTTA WONDER ABOUT YOU.

NEVER QUITE THE END

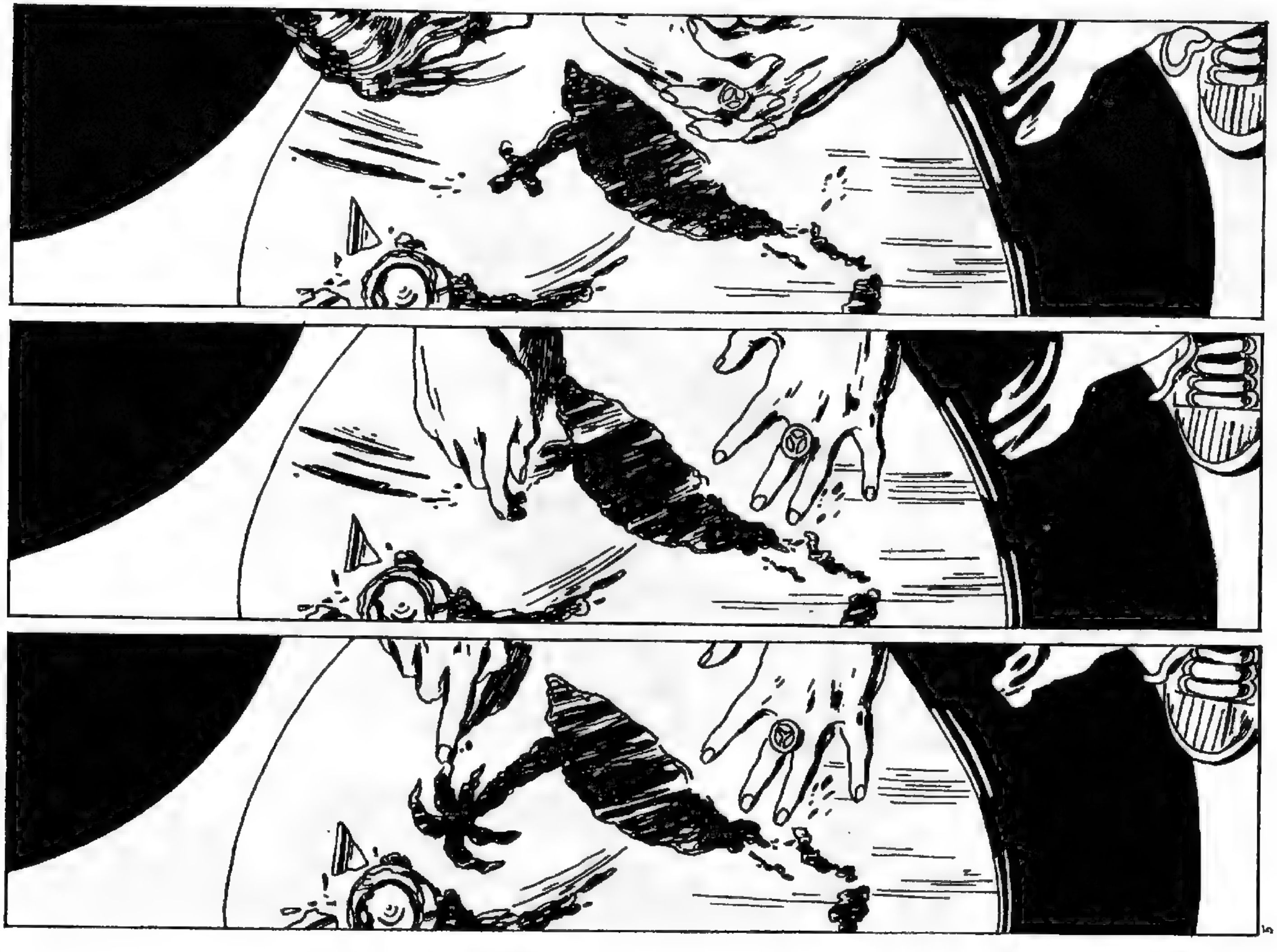
What do you think of SIMONE & AJAX? Write to Fantastic Features (at the address to the right) or email (simoneajax@aol.com) and let us know. Watch for SIMONE & AJAX in every issue of Bandic Press' MYTHOGRAPHY and in Caliber's STRANGE ATTRACTORS: MOON FEVER #3 and 4.

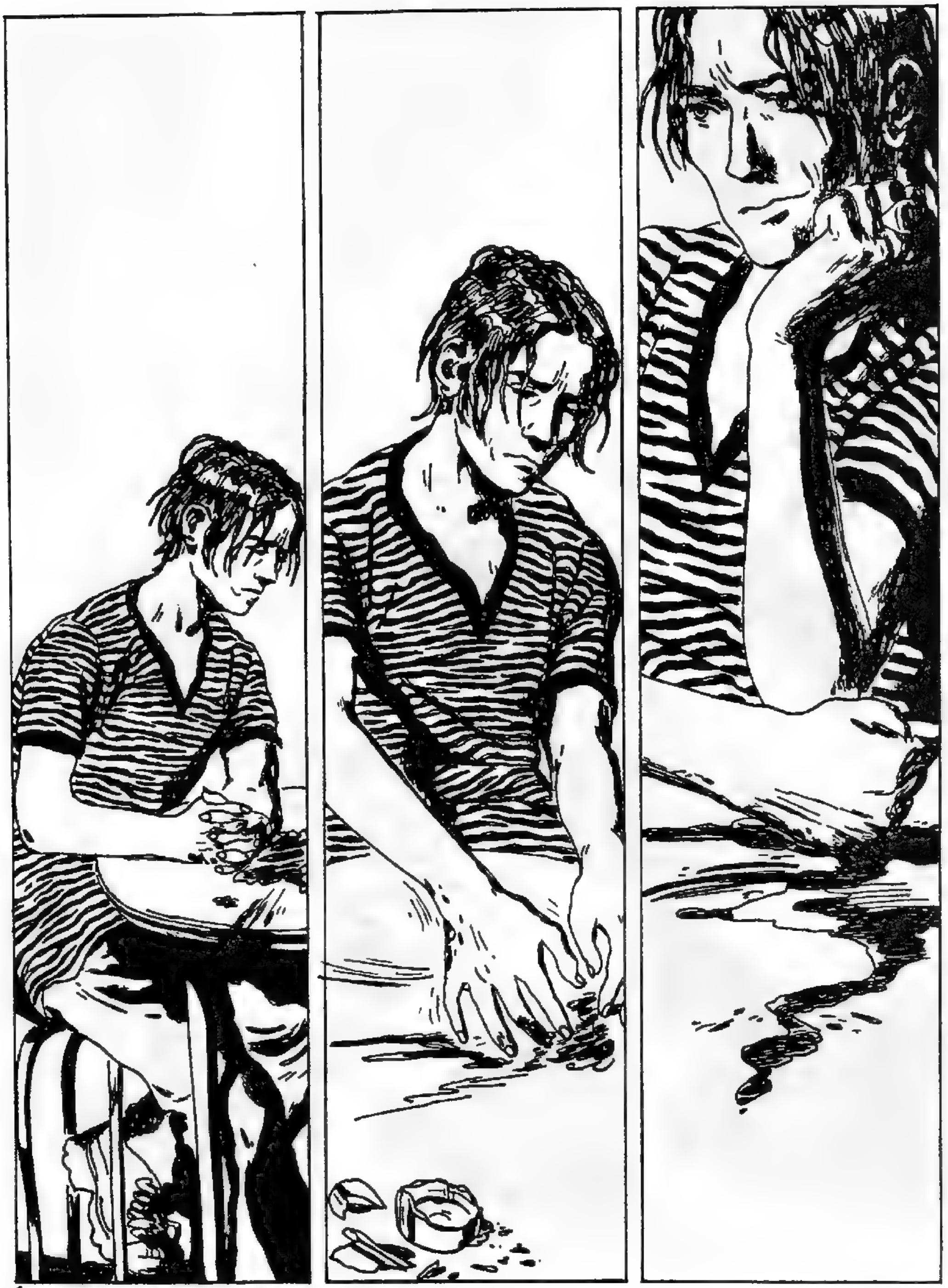
SIMONE & AJAX STUFF: Back issues - MYTHOGRAPHY #1-3, $4 ($5 foreign) each; RAGMOP #4 or TAPESTRY ANTHOLOGY #1, $3 ($4 foreign) each. T-shirt, M, XL, or XXL, $10 ($15 foreign). Make checks to "Andrew Pepoy" and send to: Fantastic Features, 2054 Kildaire Farm Rd., #200, Cary, NC 27511 USA.

this or that
Ivana

TOK!
FFFF...

TOK!





THE END

Patty Cake

by Scott Roberts

HEY PATTY-CAKE- Y'WANNA SEE A CARD TRICK?

SURE YA DO

COME OVER HERE.

PICK A CARD- ANY CARD.

LOOK AT IT, OKAY- YA KNOW WHAT CARD IT IS?

WELL, DUH- IT'S THE-

DON'T TELL ME!

ALL RIGHT- PUT IT BACK IN THE DECK ANYWHERE YA LIKE- GOOD-

NOW- LET THE MAGIC BEGIN-

SHUFFLE LIKE SO

CUT THE DECK- SHUFFLE AGAIN-

TAP THE TOP O' TH' DECK- THREE TIMES-

SLOWLY- A SINGLE CARD EMERGES-

IS IT YOURS?

I THOUGHT AS MUCH. Y'SEE- I-

WOOPS- I'LL GET 'EM

GEE- THAT IS MAGIC JOSÉ. SUDDENLY THEY'RE ALL MY CARD!

-UM-

'BYE!

DID JOSÉ SHOW YA HIS CARD TRICK, PATTY-CAKE? PRETTY COOL, HUH?

NOT REALLY, NO. BUT HE DID A REAL GOOD DISAPPEARING ACT-

END

PLEASANT VALLEY SUNDAYS

EPISODE 666

WHEN LAST WE VISITED PLEASANT VALLEY, STEPHANIE HAD JUST TOLD BRICK SHE WAS CARRYING SLATE'S BABY...

BRICK? DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?...

SLATE, MEANWHILE, HAD JUST WORKED UP THE NERVE TO TELL RINA THAT HE USED TO BE BEVERLY, AND ONCE LOVED STORM, WHO THAT VERY MORNING FOUND THE BULLET-RIDDLED BODY OF STONE IN THE TRUNK OF HER CAR!

...BRICK?

...

© 1997 CHRIS KEMP (WORDS) AND MICHAEL CHERKAS (PICTURES).

CLICK!
– HIS DEATH HAD A BIG EFFECT ON US ALL!...
BRICK?
I KNOW WHO THE KILLER IS.
...I'VE GOT TO PICK UP THE PIECES...
...AND GET ON WITH MY LIFE.

..THE MURDERER IS STILL OUT THERE...

BRICK, DO YOU STILL LOVE ME?

RING!

...NO ONE IS SAFE!

UH...UH... UH...

RING! RING! RING!

UH...

RRRN-!

OF COURSE I DO! HOW CAN YOU EVEN...

...

WELL?

I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY FOR A WHILE. SOME PLACE WHERE I CAN GET MY HEAD TOGETHER.

I HAD THAT DREAM AGAIN LAST NIGHT.

YOU MEAN THE ONE WHERE...?

...I'VE MET SOMEONE...

RING!

RING!

Y-YES?

...WHO IS IT?

IT'S HIM!

WHO IS THE KILLER? WILL BRICK EVER LOVE STEPHANIE AGAIN? WHAT'S A GOOD METHOD TO REMOVE DRIED BLOOD FROM CLOTHING? FOR THESE ANSWERS AND MORE QUESTIONS, TUNE IN TO THE NEXT EPISODE OF "PLEASANT VALLEY SUNDAYS"

COMING SOON!

HEART

TWO SAD STORIES ARE CONNECTED WITH THIS PAIR OF SWORDS. THE FIRST ONE TELLS ABOUT TWO BROTHERS ON THE OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE BATTLE OF NASEBY. THE OTHER ONE IS QUITE RECENT.

LAST WEEK, WE ENTERTAINED TWO GUESTS: YOUNG NED OF THE BANKS FAMILY FROM PITTSBURGH--

I'VE GOT YOU THIS TIME, MY LORD!

--AND SIR JAMES, THE SIXTEENTH LORD OF MARSTON.

I SHOULD BE SURPRISED, NED!

I'D BE SURPRISED TO SEE YOU SURPRISED! YOU'VE GOT A REAL POKER FACE!

ARE YOU PLANING TO CLEAN ME OUT THOROUGHLY? HAVE A HEART, JIM!

I CAN'T--

--MY HEART WAS *STOLEN* FIFTEEN YEARS AGO!

HAHAHA! IS THIS THE FAMOUS ENGLISH HUMOR?

THAT'S NO JOKE.

IT HAPPENED ON SUNDAY, THE THIRTEENTH OF JANUARY, 1980--

"--ON THE LAST HAPPY DAY OF MY LIFE!"

MAKE WAAAAY!

OH, I'M SORRY! LET ME...SO TERRIBLY SORRY! IT WAS NEVER MY INTENTION TO...

IT'S HARD NOT TO ACCEPT SUCH A HEARTFELT APOLOGY. I'M ANGELICA. YOU?

JAMES.

"I EXTENDED MY APOLOGY TO A DINNER INVITATION."

YOU HAVEN'T TOLD ME WHAT YOU DO.

NOTHING MUCH. I PLAY TENNIS A BIT, SCULPT A BIT, DO SOME *MAGIC*...

MAGIC?!

AN AMATEUR WITCH, YOU MAY SAY. LOVE POTIONS, SMALL SPELLS, STUFF LIKE THAT! IF I WANTED--

--I COULD STEAL YOUR HEART, JUST LIKE THAT!

I WALKED HER TO HER HOTEL. I CAME BACK THE FOLLOWING MORNING BUT SHE HAD ALREADY CHECKED OUT! SHE WAS GONE AND I--

I FELT--

--THAT A *PART* OF ME HAD LEFT WITH HER!

"I SEARCHED FOR HER FOR MONTHS. THAT SUMMER ON COTE D' AZUR--"

OH, IT'S YOU!

I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU!

YOU'VE REALLY DONE THAT, HAVEN'T YOU?! YOU'VE STOLEN MY *HEART!*

I'M AFRAID YOU TOOK MY LITTLE JOKE TOO FAR, **DEAR FRIEND!**

YOU'RE *PLAYING* WITH ME! YOU HAVE NO HEART!

MAYBE THAT'S WHY I NEED *YOURS!*

I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING HER EVER SINCE! AND SHE PRETENDS SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!

LISTEN, OL' BUDDY, ARE YOU SURE IT'S NOT JUST YOUR BIG, SAD *LOVE* STORY?

LOVE?! DO YOU GET THIS FROM LOVE?

WHAT'S THAT?

AFTER TWO YEARS OF FRUITLESS PURSUIT I DECIDED TO KILL MYSELF!

TO NO AVAIL. NOTHING'S BEATING IN HERE!

I KNOW YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME! BUT I CAN PROVE IT TO YOU!

SHE'LL BE AT THE OPERA TONIGHT! YOU'LL COME WITH ME!

S-SURE! HEY, WHATEVER!

CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
HURRY UP! WE MUSTN'T LOSE HER!
THERE SHE IS!
THERE YOU ARE, DEAR JAMES! NOT A SIGN OF YOU SINCE I CAME HERE--I'VE BEEN WORRIED! WHO'S YOUR FRIEND?
NED BANKS, FROM THE STATES.
IT'S A *PLEASURE* TO MEET YOU!
IT'S ALWAYS MY PLEASURE TO MEET A GENTLEMAN FROM FARAWAY PARTS!
SEE YOU LATER! I CAN COUNT ON THAT, RIGHT, JAMES?
HAVE YOU SEEN THE WITCH? HAVE YOU?!
I THINK YOU'RE OVERDOING IT!
TAXI

SHE'S A REAL LADY! THE MOST CHARMING, ELEGANT AND BEAUTIFUL WOMAN I'VE EVER MET!.

I SHOULD REALLY THANK YOU FOR INTRODUCING US!

SHOULD I SERVE DINNER, SIR?

JUST TEA, ALBERT, THANK YOU!

DO YOU THINK THAT GUY WAS HER HUSBAND?.

YOU POOR SOD! SHE'S BEWITCHED YOU, TOO! I SHOULD'VE KNOWN THIS WOULD HAPPEN!

I WAS JOKING! I KNOW YOU'RE CRAZY ABOUT HER AND I'D NEVER--*HEY!*

I JUST WANT TO SPARE YOU THE SUFFERING!

HAN!

YOU'RE NOTHING WITHOUT A HEART. A RUIN!

BUT I'LL SAVE YOU, I'LL... WHAT?

DON'T COME CLOSER! I'LL--

I'M...I'M DYING! BUT THEN...MY HEART?

I'VE GOT MY HEART BACK!...SHE...SHE'S GOT ANOTHER ONE!... PERHAPS...

...YOURS?

YOUNG NED WAS ACQUITTED, FOR HE MURDERED IN SELF-DEFENSE. THEN HE WENT TO GREECE TO SOOTHE HIS STRAINED NERVES.

MAYBE IT'S JUST BY CHANCE THAT GREECE WAS THE PLACE WHERE ANGELICA DECIDED TO SPEND THAT WINTER?

5:30 AM. JULY 17, 1949
LINCOLN CITY LIMITS.

GAS

5¢

EST. 1928
JOE'S SERVICE GARAGE

TECHNOPOLIS?! WE'RE GOIN' TO TECHNOPOLIS FOR A FRIGGIN' *SLUDGE*?! ARE YOU OUTTA YOUR MIND?

IN *NO* TIME LINCOLN CITY IS GONNA LOOK JUST LIKE THAT CRASHED HULL THEM SLUDGES CALL HOME, IF DISEASE DON'T KILL US FIRST, THEY WILL FER SURE! *CHRIST*, YOU CAN'T EVEN SWIM IN THE INLET ON ACCOUNT OF THE *MERCURY* LEVELS!

WELCOME TO NEW COLLARIA. EVERYONE. ENJOY YOUR VISIT, JUST DON'T DRINK THE WATER OR BREATHE THE AIR! I CAN REMEMBER WHEN LIFE WAS GOOD-- NONE OF THEIR KIND-- NO FLYIN' CARS, NO TELEPORTERS. SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO--

PIKE--

SHUT UP AND PAY THE MAN-- WE GOTTA SCRAM.

GAS

BIG OPPORTUNITIES HERE, PIKE. THE KIND THAT MAKE BIG BUCKS.
I LIKE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THINGS LIKE THAT.
SLUDGE MONEY IS DIRTY MONEY, STAN.
MONEY IS MONEY. THE WORLD IS FULL OF DIRTY MONEY-- YOU CAN SPEND IT THE SAME AS THE CLEAN STUFF--
--ALL YA GOTTA DO IS WIPE THE SHIT OFF IT.
TECHNOPOLIS
"BIRTHRIGHT"
WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY
ADRIE VAN VIERSEN
LETTERS BY
ANDREW PRATT
HMPH... RIGHT. IF WE LIVE THROUGH THIS ONE...

PIKE, YOU JUST LIKE TO HEAR YOURSELF *TALK!*

WE GOT *MINDER* UNITS IN CASE WE RUN INTO A COUNCIL MEMBER?

'COURSE, THEY'RE IN TH' BACK. NEW DESIGN. THEY BLOCK THE MENTAL SIGNAL DIRECTED AT YOU, AND SEND *BACK* A MIND SPLITTING SIGNAL THAT'LL HAVE 'EM BACK TO *COLLARIA!*

HOPEFULLY WE WON'T NEED 'EM.

WE'LL BE *USIN'* THEM, ALRIGHT.

GODDAMN. WE'RE AFTER A *COUNCILMEMBER?!* SHIT-- WHY ME?

CUZ YOU'RE A WHINER. YOU'VE BEEN GETTIN' THE CUSHY JOBS LATELY, 'SIDES, IT'S GONNA MAKE YOU *RICH!*

IT'S GONNA MAKE ME DEAD-- SO WHO'S THE SLUDGE WE DOIN' THIS FOR?

DONCHU WORRY 'BOUT THAT, I TAKE CARE OF THE DROP. YOU JUST KEEP YOUR MIND ON THE JOB--

-- THIS IS A SIMPLE GRAB. WE GO IN WITH MINDER UNITS ON SO HE DON'T KNOW WE'RE COMIN', STUN HIM AND GET 'IM TO TH' CAR WITH AN ANTI-GRAV BRACE. *THEN* WE ATTACH HIM TO A MINDER UNIT. FAST AND EASY.

THIS SOUNDS LIKE A *ONE MAN* JOB TO ME, WHATTAYA NEED ME FOR?

WHASSAMATTER, PIKE, OL' PAL? YOU GOT THE WILLIES? AHH, DON'T SWEAT IT--

...THIS IS *TECHNOPOLIS!*

NOTHIN' TA *WORRY* ABOUT.

TECHNOPOLIS ISSUE ONE ON SALE IN OCTOBER FROM CALIBER

TECHNOPOLIS

It is 1949.

Seventeen years ago, they arrived from the stars seeking sanctuary.

With their help, science fiction became reality.

Now, the fate of the entire planet Earth hangs in the balance.

One man holds the secret that can save the world.

...THIS IS *TECHNOPOLIS!*

NOTHIN' TA *WORRY* ABOUT.

By creator
ADRIE VAN VIERSEN

Bi-monthly and only from
CALIBER COMICS

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...comics™ to BORE & CONFUSE you

PRESENTS:

Fenwick & MAW's....

"ADVENTURES in FANTASY"

HARRR!

NOW THEN, MAW, TODAY'S TOPIC IS *FANTASY*. DO YOU KNOW THE SECRET INGREDIENT OF A GOOD FANTASY STORY?

HMMMMMMM.

A NICE MORAL?

GOOD HEAVENS *NO*, MAW! DON'T TELL ME YOU TOO HAVE BOUGHT THE **BIG LIE!!!**

THE BIG LIE? WHAT BIG LIE?

AND HOW MUCH DID I PAY FOR IT?

THE BIG LIE, MAW! THE *MYTH* THAT THE FINEST FANTASIES ARE THOSE WHICH POINT TO THE FINEST **REALITIES!**

OH, **THAT** BIG LIE! FOR A MINUTE I THOUGHT YOU MEANT ALL THOSE **SWEEPSTAKES** THEY SAID I WON!

NO, MAW. TRULY, THE SECRET OF A GOOD FANTASY STORY IS *DETAILS!* **LOTS OF DETAILS!**

MILLIONS UPON **MILLIONS** OF EXTRANEOUS DETAILS!

HOO-HOO-HA-HA-HAAA!

I.

WE MUST BUILD A **NEW** REALITY FOR THE READER TO ESCAPE INTO BY WAY OF A PLETHORA OF DETAILS!

HURRAH!

WE'LL NEED CHARTS, MAPS, GENEOLOGIES,... *OOH!* CAN'T FORGET TIMELINES!...

TUINK

WAA-

--AND APPENDICES, INDEXES, CHARACTER SKETCHES, WEAPON LISTS, PSY[illegible]AL PRO-FILES [illegible]ICAL COMP[illegible] VOLUMES...

NOW WHERE DID I PUT THAT ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIC REFERENCE MANUAL ?

AHA! THERE IT IS!

OUR RESEARCH IS COMPLETE! COME HITHER, O MUSE!

COME, THAT WE MAY PARTAKE OF THE FANTASY!

DESCEND NOW, AND **STRIKE** US!

KLONK

TWEET! TWEET! TWEET!

"ORACLE" by JESSE HAMM

THE WAR HAD BEEN LONG AND ARDUOUS AND FOR BOTH SIDES, THE FUTURE LOOKED GRIM. DESPERATE TO END THE HELLISH CONFLICT, THE TWO KINGDOMS, **CERRAL** AND **GLOTH**, AGREED TO A CONTEST. EACH WOULD CHOOSE ITS FINEST CHAMPION, AND THE TWO WOULD FACE EACH OTHER-- TO THE DEATH. TO THE WINNER: THE SPOILS. LOTS WERE CAST, AND IT WAS DETERMINED THAT THE CONTEST WOULD BE HELD IN THE DARK KINGDOM OF GLOTH. **MAVIN**, THE CHAMPION FROM THE GENTLE KINGDOM OF CERRAL WAS QUICKLY SENT TO CONTEND FOR HIS PEOPLE.

THERE THEY ARE, TOBAN... THE WICKED WALLS OF GLOTH.

WITHIN THEM, VICTORY AWAITS...

...OR DEATH.

I MUSN'T FORGET WHAT BALDORN SAID ERE I LEFT.

TELL ME, WISE BALDORN, HOWEVER WILL I DEFEAT THE GLOTHANS' GREATEST WARRIOR?

THE ETERNAL SPIRIT HAS TOLD ME, MY SON, THAT IF YOU KEEP YOURSELF FROM THEIR WINE, THEIR FOOD, AND THEIR WOMEN...

YOU WILL PREVAIL!

INSIDE.

A VISITOR FROM CERRAL, YOUR GRACE. HIS NAME IS *MAVIN*. HE HAS COME TO CHALLENGE **BARUK** FOR THE KINGDOM.

HIM? I ASKED FOR THEIR BEST WARRIOR. WHY DID THEY SEND ME THIS PATHETIC GOB OF SPIT?

FEH.

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING, MY LORD.

I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE YOUR FACE WHEN I **DEFEAT** YOUR MIGHTY BARUK!

YOU DEFEAT *BARUK*? HA!

I SHALL ENJOY WATCHING YOU *DIE* IN THE ARENA TOMORROW, BOY!

CHANCELLOR! SHOW HIM TO HIS QUARTERS!

AND MAVIN...

PLEASE DON'T MIND THE RATS!.

LOVELY.

FIRST HE INSULTS ME AND NOW I GET TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE DUNGEON! AT LEAST IT WILL BE OVER TOMORROW, WHEN I *WIN*...

IF I WI-

UNHAND ME, CRETIN! IS THAT ANY WAY TO TREAT A LADY?!?

HUNH?

IT IS IF SHE WAS JUST CAUGHT STEALING **BREAD!**

HAR HAR HAR HAR!

NOW **IN** THERE AN' PIPE DOWN BEFORE WE *BEAT* YOU!

HN!

!

NINJAK

HAR HAR HAR HAR HAR

ELF

ARE YOU ALRIGHT, M'LADY?

YES-- YES, I'M -- OH!

YOU'RE THAT CERRALIAN!

HENH! FEAR NOT; I WON'T HARM YOU. **MY** BATTLE IS WITH THE ELF WARRIOR, **BARUK.**

BARUK, EH?

BARUK IS A TERRIBLE KILLER. I WOULDN'T THINK MUCH OF YOUR CHANCES...

...IF NOT FOR YOUR OBVIOUS *FINESSE*, THAT IS.

HM-HN!

YOU MAY LIVE YET, O WARRIOR!

AND THAT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU?

IF I WIN, MAIDEN, YOUR KINGDOM WILL BE OURS.

"OURS"... "YOURS"...

I'M STARVING IN PRISON, BOY! WHAT SHOULD I CARE IF WE'RE RULED BY ONE KING OR ANOTHER?

EITHER WAY, I'VE NO GUARANTEE I'LL LAST THE WEEK, THE WAY THOSE GUARDS WERE TREATING ME.

REST EASY, MAIDEN, IF I *DO* WIN THIS KINGDOM, KNOW YOU THIS DAY THAT YOU WON'T BE HARMED.

YOU'RE KIND, WARRIOR--

--FRIEND.

MY NAME IS MAVIN.

CALL ME ZOOR.

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A FRIEND IN THIS HORRID, EVIL PLACE, MAVIN.

MAVIN?

YES?

DESPITE ALL YOUR CONFIDENCE...

IS IT NOT TRUE THAT NEITHER OF US KNOWS WHETHER...

--WHETHER OR NOT WE'LL SURVIVE?

WELL, YES...I SUPPOSE THAT'S TRUE...

AND, WELL, YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW IF YOU'LL EVER FEEL THE TOUCH OF A WOMAN AGAIN.

AND *I* DON'T KNOW IF I'LL EVER AGAIN KNOW THE TOUCH OF A *MAN*...

ZOOR! *NO!* I CAN'T!

BUT WHY?

WELL, BALDORN-- OUR WISEMAN--

--SAID I MUST KEEP MYSELF FROM WINE, WOMEN, AND FOOD.

>giggle<

FINE ADVICE, INDEED, KIND WARRIOR. BUT ADVICE SHOULD BE AS A TOOL IN YOUR HANDS, NOT A *WHIP* AT YOUR BACK!

MIGHT NOT THE CRAFTSMAN *EVER* LAY DOWN HIS TOOLS TO DRINK FROM THE CHALICE OF LOVE?

I THOUGHT SO.

COME, WARRIOR, UNDRESS ME NOW...

AND LET US DRINK DEEP OF LOVE UNTIL DAWN.

MORNING.

WHERE IS YOUR CHAMPION, O KING? WHERE IS BARUK?

LET HIM FACE ME NOW THAT I MIGHT VANQUISH HIM AND WIN THIS WRETCHED WAR!

LET BARUK FACE YOU?

SILLY BOY! BARUK HAS ALREADY FACED YOU AND WON!

WHU--?

WHAT FOOLISHNESS IS THIS? EXPLAIN YOURSELF!

PERHAPS *I* SHOULD EXPLAIN, MAVIN.

I AM BARUK.

AND FOR THE RECORD, I HAPPEN TO CARRY A RATHER *NASTY* LITTLE DISEASE...

...ONE WHICH IS PASSED, BY-- SHALL WE SAY, *"DIRECT CONTACT"*?

AND WHILE FEMALES ARE THANK-FULLY IMMUNE TO ITS EFFECTS...

...ANY **MALE** WHO CONTRACTS IT EXPERIENCES A QUICK AND REGRETFULLY **AGONIZING** DEATH.

FAREWELL, FRIEND MAVIN...

...AND THANK-YOU *EVER* SO MUCH FOR HELPING ME WIN US YOUR **BLESSED** KINGDOM...

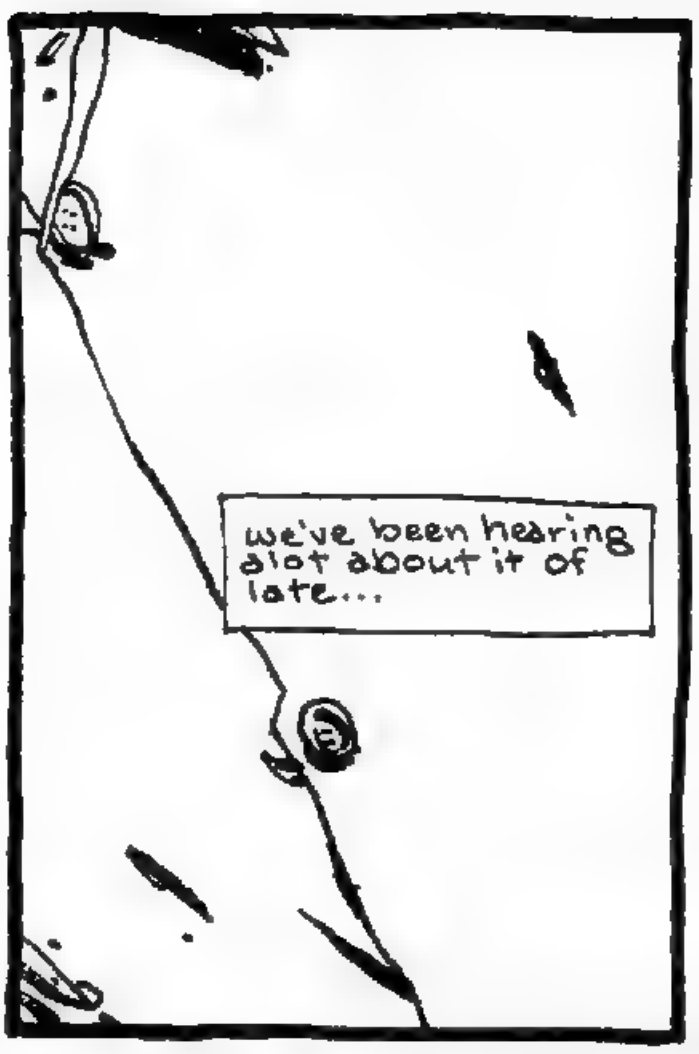
"...I COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU!"

THE END.

OOG! SOMEBODY WAKE ME UP!

©JESSE HAMM 1996

fractal no.4



M@SMITH© 1994

STRAIT-JACKET

TO POSSESS A CHILDLIKE INNOCENCE IS TO POSSESS A PIECE OF HEAVEN.

I CAN REMEMBER BEING YOUNG ONCE.

IT WAS A *DIFFERENT* TIME...

A *DIFFERENT* PLACE.

IT WAS *SO* LONG AGO, BUT IT SEEMS *JUST* LIKE YESTERDAY.

AT LEAST TO *ME*, IT *WAS* YESTERDAY.

YOU SEE, I'VE BEEN IN A CATATONIC STATE, MENTALLY WITHDRAWN INTO MYSELF, FOR THE PAST 16 YEARS OR SO.

MY MIND HAD A *COMPLETE* SHUT-DOWN.

I'VE BEEN TOLD IT WAS A RESULT OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED WHEN I WAS SEVEN...

...SOMETHING TRAGIC...

...SOMETHING THAT LEFT ME AN ORPHAN...

...AN ORPHAN WITHOUT A MIND...

...WITHOUT A FUTURE.

IT'S AMAZING IN RETROSPECT.

THAT *ONE* CHILDHOOD INCIDENT COULD ERASE MY WHOLE BEING.

DON'T WALK

JUST ONE *TRAUMATIC* REACTION COULD TAKE THAT SENSE OF WONDER...

...AND TURN IT INTO A STATE OF ABSOLUTE...

FEAR!

AND THE SOUL BECOMES LOST...

WALK

SCREEEEECH

ALONE.

FLOATING AIMLESSLY WITHIN ITS HOST...

ALWAYS SEARCHING...

ALWAYS SEEKING THAT CENTER OF STRENGTH.

YOU KNOW, WHEN YOU'RE INSANE THE WORLD SEEMS *SO CLEAR.*

THE JUMBLED MESS THAT IS YOUR BRAIN BECOMES AN OPEN DOOR.

LIVING WITHIN YOURSELF CAN BE A *VERY* SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.

A PURIFICATION.

A CLEANSING.

THE OUTSIDE WORLD BECOMES LESS...

...AND *LESS* IMPORTANT.

12:00

TO BE ONE WITH YOUR MIND *IS* TO BE AT PEACE.

IT'S NIRVANA.

I AM THIS REALITY'S MESSIAH.

I'VE COME TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM ITSELF.

TO SHOW THEM A NEW PATH.

BUT THE ONLY UNDERLYING QUESTION REMAINING IS...

...*WHO* IS TO SAVE ME FROM MY *OWN* MIND?

COMPANY?

HELLO, MR. BALLOON.

KLINK!

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

JUST ONE SEC...

THERE, THAT'S BETTER.

ARE YOU LOST, MY FRIEND?

WHAT DO YOU HOLD WITHIN YOU?

OH, I SEE...

A CHILD'S JOY.

SO SAD.

WE CAN'T HAVE THIS.

GO, RETURN TO HER.

FILL HER HEART.

COMFORT HER.

WHAT DO *YOU* SEE WHEN YOU WITNESS YOUR REFLECTION IN A MIRROR?

I SEE A *TRUE* REFLECTION OF MY FRAGMENTED AND SHATTERED LIFE.

I SEE MY SOUL...

...MY INNER SELF...

...MY *TRUE* HOME.

WHAT IN THE WORLD?!...

I MAY BE CRAZY...

...BUT...

...SOMETIMES INSANITY...

...IS THE ONLY ESCAPE...

...FROM BEING SANE.

"WHEN WE REMEMBER WE ARE ALL MAD, THE MYSTERIES DISAPPEAR AND LIFE STANDS EXPLAINED."
--MARK TWAIN

What would you do
if everything you've ever wanted or
desired were now at
your fingertips?

What would happen
to your mind if you could
change reality with
but a thought?

"I have seen God, and it is me."

STRAIT JACKET

Written by JAMES PRUETT Art by ANDY BENNETT

COMING IN 1998

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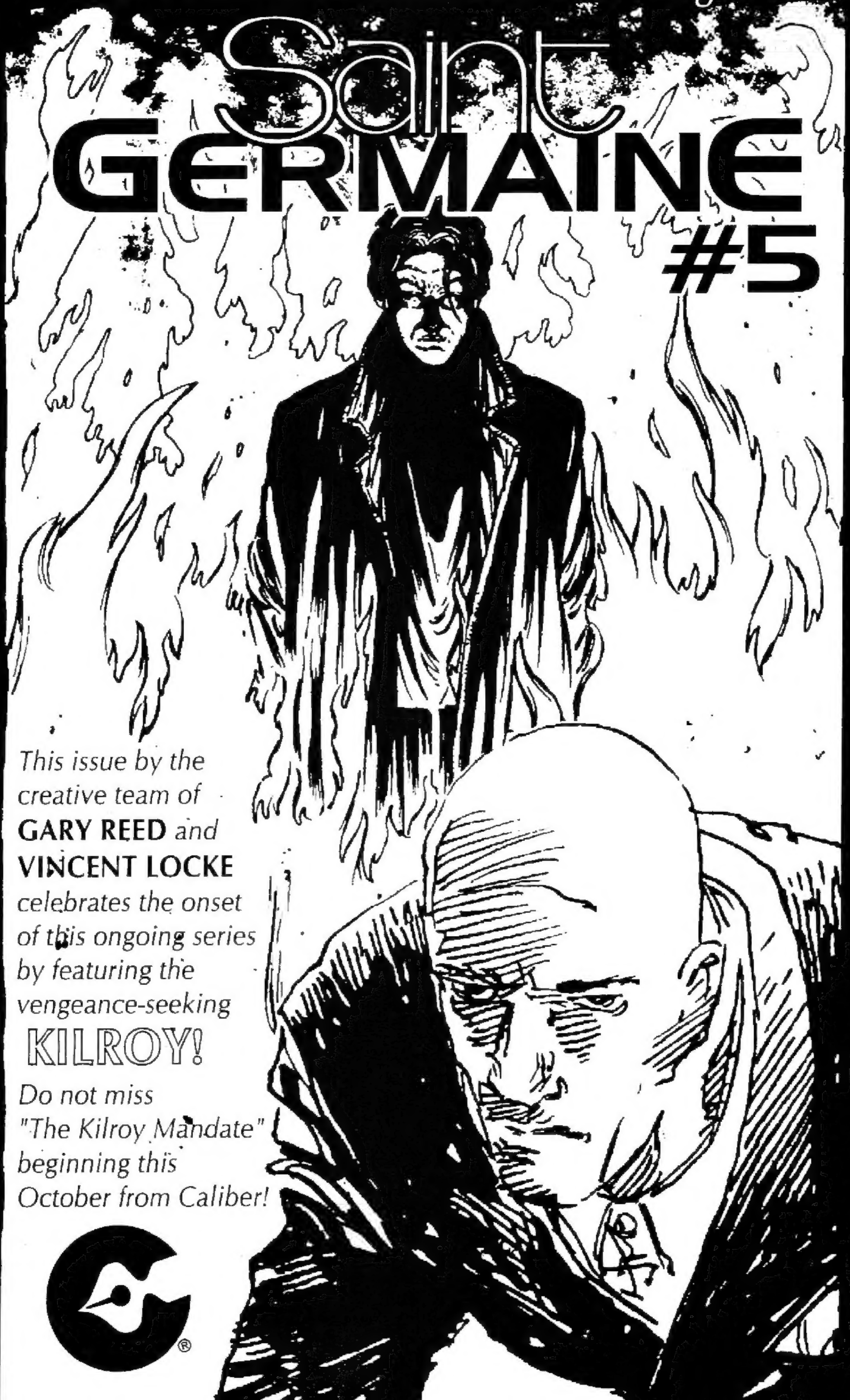
Saint GERMAINE #5



This issue by the creative team of **GARY REED** *and* **VINCENT LOCKE** *celebrates the onset of this ongoing series by featuring the vengeance-seeking*

KILROY!

Do not miss "The Kilroy Mandate" beginning this October from Caliber!

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